

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 134

FL 025 892

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TITLE Successful Transition into Mainstream English: Effective Strategies for Studying Literature. Educational Practice Report No. 2.

INSTITUTION Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, Santa Cruz, CA.

SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.

PUB DATE 1999-00-00

NOTE 36p.

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Educational Strategies; Elementary Education; \*English (Second Language); \*Limited English Speaking; \*Literature Appreciation; Program Descriptions; Program Effectiveness; Second Language Instruction; \*Transitional Programs

## ABSTRACT

This report describes a multi-year transitional program designed to move limited-English-speakers in the elementary grades into mainstream classroom instruction, focusing on the study of literature as a central strategy. The program is designed to challenge students academically, be comprehensive, provide continuity, and build explicit connections between students' existing knowledge and experiences and the academic curriculum. An overview of the program's design is given, and instructional components and strategies of the language arts program are described. A sample literature unit based on one text is detailed, illustrating the use of the four major strategies. Results of a program evaluation indicating the positive impact of the transitional program are outlined. Contains 42 references. (MSE)

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# **SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION INTO MAINSTREAM ENGLISH: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR STUDYING LITERATURE**

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Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence



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# **SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION INTO MAINSTREAM ENGLISH: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR STUDYING LITERATURE**

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**1999**



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### EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE REPORT NO. 2

Editing: Sonia Kundert and Lynn Fischer

Production: Sonia Kundert

Cover & interior design: SAGARTdesign



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## CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON EDUCATION, DIVERSITY & EXCELLENCE (CREDE)

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The Center is designed to move issues of risk, diversity, and excellence to the forefront of discussions concerning educational research, policy, and practice. Central to its mission, CREDE's research and development focus on critical issues in the education of linguistic and cultural minority students and students placed at risk by factors of race, poverty, and geographic location. CREDE's research program is based on a sociocultural framework that is sensitive to diverse cultures and languages, but powerful enough to identify the great commonalities that unite people.

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## ABSTRACT

This is one of a series of reports on various aspects of a multi-year Spanish-to-English language arts transition curriculum that seeks to promote first and second language acquisition and academic achievement in the early grades. After providing an overview of the multi-year transition program, this report focuses on how an 8-week literature unit—the intensive study of a carefully chosen literature text—is conducted.

The following four fundamental theoretical premises that undergird the project are described: (1) challenge, (2) comprehensiveness, (3) continuity, and (4) connections between students' existing knowledge and the academic content to be learned.

Four strategies found to be effective and the corresponding tools used are as follows:

(1) Build students' background knowledge. Background-building lessons and activities support the literature unit and provide a means to integrate language arts and social studies. Students complete supplemental reading through assigned independent readings, teacher read-alouds, and books available for pleasure reading.

(2) Draw on students' personal experiences. Individual "literature logs" are students' written answers to specific questions about themes in the story being studied. The questions elicit students' personal experiences relevant to the story.

(3) Promote extended discourse through writing and discussion. "Working the text"—reading it, re-reading it, discussing it, writing about it, and listening to what others have written about it—gives students opportunities to develop new ways to interpret and articulate ideas. A final writing project shows how students' understanding of the literature text has expanded and how their ability to write about it has been enhanced.

(4) Assist students in re-reading pivotal portions of the text. In preparation for the unit, the teacher "chunks" the book into manageable portions of reading that begin and end at meaningful junctures. In one or more chunks, the content is complex and critical to the larger understanding of the story and its theme(s). Such chunks require more time and intensive discussion and may be further divided into parts. Using background knowledge that students gained during study of the story and through further exploration of students' personal experiences, the teacher guides students through each step of a pivotal portion.

Evaluation studies of the benefit of such literacy instruction suggest that the program is providing students with a demonstrably successful transition experience. Mean national percentiles scores for project students increased from the 44th to 72nd percentile in reading and from the 40th to the 78th percentile in language. In comparison, percentile scores for nonproject students showed smaller gains. Project students also scored significantly higher than nonproject students on project-developed performance-based measures of English reading and writing.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our thanks to administrators, teachers, and children at the project schools who made this work possible, especially members of the project team: Abbey Alessi, Kris Bullivant, Dolores Beltrán, Victor Chavira, Rafael Delgado, Susan Dickson, Melissa Dodd, Teresa Franco, Mae Hom, Gerardo López, Cindy Kim, Albert Martínez, Celia Mata, Lydia Moreno, Sylvia Salazar, Liz Salcido, Susan Sandberg, Imelda Valencia, Sally Wong, and Rossana Yñiguez. Thanks also to Tina Saldivar, Russell Gersten, and Claude Goldenberg for their helpful comments. The project described here was supported by a Title VII grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs. Additional research support was provided by the Spencer Foundation, the National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning, and the Urban Education Studies Center, UCLA Graduate School of Education. No endorsement from any source should be inferred.

Results presented in this report first appeared as a chapter published in a volume edited by Russell Gersten and Robert Jiménez (see Saunders, O'Brien, Lennon, & McLean, 1998).



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## INTRODUCTION

Students who are learning English and receiving instruction in their native language during the early years of schooling eventually "transition" into mainstream English. Transition can occur anywhere from the early elementary grades to middle school or later, depending on what type of program a school has in place, when a student begins the program, and individual student characteristics and achievement. (For descriptions of various programming options for English language learners, see Genesee, 1999.)

Although many educators consider this period a positive indication that English language learners are entering the mainstream, transition can be problematic for both students and teachers. Teachers' expectations tend to drop and, along with them, students' cognitive learning opportunities (Berman et al., 1992). If transition is handled too abruptly, achievement can decline precipitously (Ramirez, 1992). Students are also more likely to be referred for compensatory or special education during the transition years (Gersten, 1996). Transition is a crucial period during which many English learners are especially vulnerable to academic underachievement.

Unfortunately, educators have little research upon which to base policy and practice (Goldenberg, 1996). Teachers tend to describe themselves as overwhelmingly uncertain about the appropriate methods to use during transition (Gersten & Woodward, 1994). Even in schools and districts recognized for their exemplary bilingual programs, transition is often a conundrum (Berman et al., 1992). Much of the existing research has focused on the timing and duration of transition (e.g., Ramirez, 1992). Far less attention has been devoted to empirical studies of effective transition instruction and curriculum (Gersten, 1996).

Since 1991, the authors of this report have been involved in a research and development project at five predominantly Latino elementary schools in the Los Angeles area where an average of 84% of the students are limited-English proficient upon enrollment. Teachers, project advisors, and researchers are collaborating to develop, implement, and describe an instructional program that significantly improves the chances of limited-English proficient children from Spanish-speaking backgrounds to transition successfully from Spanish bilingual instruction to all-English mainstream instruction. The fundamental goal is to increase substantially the development of both Spanish and English academic literacy.

Informed by the current and previous work of researchers collaborating with us (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991; Goldenberg & Sullivan, 1994; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Hamann, 1992; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), other available research (Calderón, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1998; Dalton, 1998; Garcia, 1992, 1995; Gersten, 1996; Gersten & Jiménez, 1993; Ramirez, 1992; Tharp, 1997) and our own evaluation studies (Saunders, in press; Saunders & Lennon, 1993, 1996), the project team has developed and implemented a transition program of three phases: Pre-Transition, Transition I, and Transition II.

In previous publications, we referred to the program as a 3-year transition program, with Pre-Transition, Transition I, and Transition II delivered optimally in Grades 3, 4 and 5, respectively. In actuality, however, we have been implementing the Pre-Transition phase of the program at both Grades 2 and 3. Thus, we now refer to the program as a multi-year transition program, optimally spanning Grades 2 through 5.

As part of this effort, we developed language arts curriculum and performance assessments for each phase of the program. Four fundamental theoretical *premises*



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undergird the program, all of which are assumed to promote first and second language acquisition and academic achievement:

1. Challenge: Consistently challenge students academically. Challenge them to think, learn, and engage intellectually.
2. Comprehensiveness: Address both meaning and skills, promote both higher level thinking and appropriate drill and practice, and provide complementary portions of student- and teacher-centeredness.
3. Continuity: Achieve continuity in curriculum and instruction as students move from primary to middle to upper grades, and from Spanish to English language arts.
4. Connections: Build upon and make explicit the connections between students' existing knowledge, skills, and experiences and the academic curriculum to be learned (including language, literacy, and content).

In general, our efforts have proved successful. In comparison to the typical transition program in our district, our program produced

- significantly higher levels of Spanish literacy achievement at Grades 3 and 4 and English literacy achievement at Grade 5, as gauged by both standardized and performance-based assessments;
- significantly higher numbers of students who formally demonstrated fluent English proficiency by Grade 5 and were reclassified from "limited" to "fluent" English proficient; and
- more positive attitudes toward bilingualism—specifically toward Spanish literacy—for significantly larger numbers of students (Saunders, in press).

## Overview of the Multi-Year Transition Program

As in other parts of California (Berman et al., 1992), our district administration was concerned about low levels of student achievement during transition and uncertain what to do about transition curriculum and instruction (Saunders & Lennon, 1993). Our project team (18 teachers, 3 project advisors, and 1 researcher) was formed to examine how transition was operating in the project schools, then research and develop a more successful program.

The multi-year conceptualization of transition optimally spans Grades 2 through 5. Grades 2 and 3 are explicitly considered Pre-Transition years, Grade 4 is Transition I, and Grade 5 is Transition II. See CREDE Research Report 6 by Saunders and Goldenberg, 1999, for a more detailed description of the program. The multi-year conceptualization of transition presumes two things, as follows:

1. Students receive effective language arts instruction.
2. Students receive a coherent program of language arts instruction from Grades 2 through 5, from primary language through transitional language arts.

In the district where we work, all Spanish-speaking students classified as limited English proficient (LEP) who are enrolled in the transitional bilingual program receive language arts and content area instruction in Spanish while they are acquiring oral English proficiency, primarily through 20–30 minutes of daily ESL instruction. This program continues until students demonstrate grade-level proficiency in Spanish reading and writing and basic oral English proficiency, as measured by district-developed assessments. When students demonstrate these proficiencies, they qualify for transition and begin English reading and writing instruction, during which time they are to continue receiving Spanish language arts as well. According to the district guidelines, transitional language arts should last approximately 3 to 6 months and concen-



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trate on nontransferable English skills, vocabulary development, oral and reading comprehension, and written language. Subsequent to this period, students enter a mainstream English program. Students are officially reclassified as fluent English proficient (FEP) when they demonstrate grade-level or close to grade-level reading, writing, and oral language skills on standardized English language achievement tests (i.e., at or above the 36th national percentile).

When we began work at the project schools, two things were readily apparent:

1. Students were not being effectively prepared to qualify for and enter transition.
2. The transitional program that was offered to students when they did qualify was, at best, underspecified.

Schools had grossly underestimated the amount of time that might be devoted to a transitional language arts program. The district's 3- to 6-month guidelines encouraged schools to think of transition as a relatively short period of time sandwiched between Spanish and mainstream English language arts, so short as to prohibit any serious attention to curriculum or training.

We designed Transition I and II to meet the need for a concrete transition program of serious substance and duration. The goal across the 2 years is reclassification: Students have transitioned and can perform successfully in a mainstream program when they have grade-level, or close to grade-level, English skills.

The Pre-Transition component emphasizes the fundamental role of Spanish reading and writing and oral English. Large numbers of students were not qualifying to enter transition, because they were not functioning at grade level in Spanish literacy, and they were not acquiring oral English skills. We therefore included Grades 2 and 3 as Pre-Transition years in the larger transitional program. The thrust of this phase is intensive Spanish reading and writing instruction and extensive oral English development.

## **Instructional Components of the Language Arts Program**

As part of our work on the transition program, we identified the following 12 instructional components that seemed most effective in serving the needs of students throughout the three phases of the program. (See CREDE Research Report 6 by Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999, for descriptions of these components.)

### **Literature studies**

1. Literature units (experience-text-relationship approach [ETR])
2. Literature logs
3. Instructional conversations
4. Culminating writing projects (writing-as-a-process approach)

### **Skill building**

5. Comprehension strategies
6. Assigned independent reading
7. Dictation
8. Written conventions lesson
9. English language development (ELD) through literature (Pre-Transition years)

### **Other supporting components**

10. Pleasure reading
11. Teacher read-alouds
12. Interactive journals



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Some of these components were intended specifically to address the needs of transition students, while many of them stand on their own as effective language arts strategies for the middle and upper elementary grades. It was essential, however, to operationalize these components, integrate them into a total language arts program, develop complementary management systems, and apply them to programs for English language learners who were making the transition.

## **Studying Literature—Four Strategies That Work**

Studying literature is one of the major emphases in the California Language Arts Framework (California State Department of Education, 1987, 1999). Yet, like many schools in California, project schools had provided only minimal training in literature-based approaches to reading instruction (Gersten, 1996). Teachers were not sure how to use literature effectively and how to balance basic skills with the new meaning-oriented approaches. This approach was particularly challenging for transition teachers who, following district guidelines, took as their primary responsibility the teaching of such discrete, nontransferable skills as letter sounds, vocabulary, possessives, syntax, and homonyms.

Across all phases of our program, from Pre-Transition to Transition II—from Spanish to English language arts—literature units are the central instructional component. Discussions, writing projects, social studies content, and supplementary readings are all based on the literary selection being studied. Four specific instructional strategies have proven to be fundamental to the success of studying literature with transition students, as follows:

1. Build students' background knowledge.
2. Draw on students' personal experiences.
3. Promote extended discourse through writing and discussion.
4. Assist students in re-reading pivotal portions of the text.

Literature units are the central component of our program, because we hypothesized that transition students would benefit from more extensive and intensive opportunities to work with text and to study interesting stories under the tutelage of a teacher. Using research conducted as part of the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program in Hawaii (Au, 1979, 1992; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) and Spanish-speaking Latino communities in southern California (Goldenberg, 1992-93), we adapted the experience-text-relationship (ETR) approach as our framework for studying literature. Through ongoing discussions, writing activities, and reading, the teacher helps students study the story in relationship to their own experiences and a central theme.

The metaphor for this approach to studying literature is weaving (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). With the assistance of the teacher, students weave together new and existing knowledge, experiences, and concepts. Building students' *background knowledge* prior to and throughout the literature unit helps contextualize story themes, content and vocabulary. Drawing upon, sharing, and discussing students' relevant *personal experiences* sustains motivation and helps students make concrete and conceptual connections to the text, its content, and the themes under study.

The media for weaving are writing and discussion (or Instructional Conversations, ICs; see Dalton, 1998; Tharp, 1997; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, Goldenberg, 1992-93), both of which can promote *extended discourse*: opportunities for students to use language to elaborate and develop ideas. Discussions set up writing assignments, and writings inform subsequent discussions throughout the course of the literature unit. Writing—at least at the point of composing—is an individual opportunity for each student to think



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about and articulate ideas, interpretations, and related experiences. Discussions provide a social opportunity for students and teacher to collaboratively build more elaborated and sophisticated understandings.

Within this dynamic of reading, writing, and discussion, however, are critical junctures at which students need careful *re-reading assistance* from the teacher in order to fully comprehend the content of the text. Typically, this comes at pivotal points in the story where the stylistic or semantic qualities of the text have to be highlighted and clarified for the students.

In terms of literacy development, students are learning to comprehend text, to make connections between the text and their own lives, and develop more fully formed concepts through this recurrent process of individual and social discourse—of reading, writing, and discussing. “For literacy, meaningful discourse is both the destination and vehicle” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 93).

In terms of second language acquisition theory (Cummins, 1989; Krashen, 1987), our working hypothesis is that these four strategies help provide substantial comprehensible input—language that includes slightly more sophisticated structures or vocabulary than the learner can produce on his or her own, but which the learner can understand within the total context in which it is used. Starting with background building activities, continuing with written and oral sharing of students’ personal experiences, supported by timely re-reading assistance, and ultimately promoting extended discourse through writing and discussion, the literature unit becomes a meaningful social context in which words, phrases, language structures, and concepts are used, acquired, and learned.

## AN EXAMPLE LITERATURE UNIT

This section illustrates how teachers in our project conduct a literature unit, employing the four strategies. As part of our effort to document the program, project advisors and teachers have been writing detailed descriptions of what transpired as they taught particular units. This section contains a condensed version of a unit write-up prepared by Gisela O’Brien and Jerry McLean (advisor and teacher), who developed this unit for *Annie and the Old One* (Miles, 1971) and have conducted it with both fourth- and fifth-grade transition students. (See the Appendix, a one-page planner for the entire unit.)

### About the Story, Theme, and Conduct of the Unit

#### Why *Annie and the Old One*?

Teachers in our project typically use *Annie and the Old One* near the end of Transition I (Grade 4) or the beginning of Transition II (Grade 5). *Annie and the Old One* has many benefits as a reading experience for transition students. It is a fifth-grade Core literature selection for our school district, so students are reading the same level material as their fluent-English-speaking peers. The language is challenging, but manageable with the appropriate scaffolding (i.e., background building, discussion, and assisted re-reading).

In choosing this book for a literature study for transition students, we considered not only readability, but the content and potential themes of the story. Annie is a Navajo girl who learns about the natural cycle of life and death from her grandmother—the Old One. The first part of the book describes Annie’s environment and daily activities and introduces her grandmother, who tells Annie it is time for her to learn to weave. Annie declines her mother’s subsequent invitation to help with the weaving of a new rug. But shortly thereafter, the Old One announces she will “return to mother Earth” when the new rug is finished and asks each family member to choose a gift. Annie chooses the



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Old One's weaving stick, but then, thinking she can forestall her grandmother's death, Annie tries to disrupt her mother's work on the rug. The Old One discovers Annie's efforts, and in a short but dramatic exchange on the top of a mesa overlooking the desert, the Old One explains that death is a natural part of life. Annie comes to a new understanding and in the closing scene begins to weave "as her mother had done, as her grandmother had done."

## **The Legacy Theme**

The most successful and motivating theme of *Annie and the Old One* is the concept of *legacy*. Every human being affects the people whose lives he or she touches. Whether a person dies or simply moves away, a legacy is left behind. Most upper elementary students have dealt with the death of an older relative or separation from a friend. At the same time, they are ready to develop more complex and sophisticated views of separation and loss, particularly in relationship to the idea of a legacy. Initially students often talk about the concrete sense of missing someone or not being able to do things with them. But they are less likely to grasp the ways in which that person has contributed to their lives and the ways in which we carry on and remind ourselves of such people through memories and artifacts. Legacy is one of the many themes that can be studied through *this story*.

## **Integrating With Social Studies**

*Annie* also lends itself to the study of Native American Indian cultures, which is part of the fourth- and fifth-grade history-social studies curriculum. Background building lessons and activities support the literature unit and provide a means to integrate language arts and social studies. Students complete supplemental reading about Native Americans through assigned independent readings, teacher read-alouds, and books available for pleasure reading.

## **Whole-Class and Small-Group Activities**

Initial lessons and activities completed before we begin reading the book are usually conducted whole class. Once we begin the process of reading and working the text, however, all lessons are carried out in small groups. Small groups give each student more opportunity and responsibility to contribute to the discussion. Small groups also make it easier for the teacher to gauge how each student is understanding the text and address the needs of those who are having difficulty.

## **Time Devoted to the Unit**

The unit takes about 8 weeks: 2 weeks for beginning activities, 5 weeks for working the text, and 1 week for the culminating project. This chronology is based on the three-group rotation system developed by this teacher and project advisor. Rather than rotate through all groups each day, the teacher devotes an entire 70-minute time block to one group each day. This organization scheme includes two other centers (class groupings in different areas of the classroom). One center is led by the aide, who in Transition I works on Spanish language arts and in Transition II works on English reading comprehension strategies or other types of language arts instruction. The other center is for independent work—assignments for the literature unit or assigned independent reading.

## **Reading and Writing That Supplements the Unit**

Understandably, devoting 8 weeks to a 44-page text may be difficult to imagine. How do you get students to stay with the text that long? Isn't it an insufficient amount of reading for students to do? The many varied assignments we give as part of the literature unit sustains the students' interest and, as part of the language arts program, students are also doing a large amount of assigned independent reading that supplements the literature study. For example, during the *Annie* unit, students read and



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complete assignments for other selections with similar content and themes—*Nanabah's Friend*, *Blue Wings Flying*, *Through Grandpa's Eyes*, and *A Gift for Alicia* (short stories from the Houghton-Mifflin Transitional Reading Series, 1986); *Dancing Drum*, *Turquoise Boy*, *Little Firefly*, *Clamshell Boy*, *Quill Worker*, and *Ka-ha-si and the Loom* (from Watermill Press's *Native American Legends* series, 1990).

## Literature Logs

In preparing a literature unit, teachers develop specific log prompts for each chunk of the literary selection. Prompts might ask students to write about a personal experience related to the story, elaborate on something that has happened in the story, or interpret some aspect of the story or theme. Students complete the log entry at an independent center. Small group discussions typically begin with some or all students sharing their logs, and new prompts often emerge naturally from these small group discussions.

## Beginning the Unit

We begin a literature study by building pertinent background knowledge and drawing on students' related personal experiences. The goal is to activate and develop a schema that is relevant to the story and theme.

We began the Annie unit by asking students to make predictions based on the cover of the book, which has a number of clues about the content of the story. (The cover bears the title and shows a profile of Annie—with a single bead woven into a strand of hair—looking over at a loom positioned in front of her hogan. In the background is a mesa and an expansive horizon.) Asking students for predictions allowed us to identify and clarify for the whole class anything that was not readily apparent to them. For example, many students did not grasp the term "old one." Some thought it referred to an inanimate object of some sort because they did not grasp the usage of the word "one." Some understood it to refer to an older person, but they did not grasp the subtlety of "the," which helps to convey the singular importance of that particular older person. These language and conceptual issues had to be discussed and clarified.

We also conducted two activities in order to develop more fully this initial schema. To establish a concrete reference for the concept of the "old one," students wrote, shared, and discussed a literature log about an important older person in their own lives. To elaborate their understanding of the time, place, and culture depicted in the story, the class developed short reports on the four major North American Indian cultures from which most of the many different tribes evolved. Small groups of students used material from the social studies textbook to prepare the reports.

### Log Entry—Drawing on students' relevant personal experiences

Students' responses to the log prompts varied. Many students described a very close and important relationship with an older person. Some had not actually experienced such a relationship, but described the benefits they thought such a relationship might provide. A small number of students wrote about clearly negative experiences with an older person.

The responses showed us which students might have difficulty understanding Annie's perspective—a critical part of comprehending the text and working with the legacy theme. Students who had no positive or direct experiences with an "old one" heard about the experiences of those who did, making it possible to provide all students with concrete examples of "old one"—a central concept in the story. The responses illustrate the role of personal experiences and the importance of log sharing: It is not necessary that every student in the class have accessible, concrete experience related to the text. If experiences are shared, all students will—with the assistance of the teacher—be able to see similarities between the experiences of characters in the story and their own.



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Using what students shared in their log entries, the teacher charted various things that the students mentioned: the kinds of people who were “the old one,” activities they shared with “the old one,” and their feelings about having such a relationship. These charts were saved and subsequently revisited in order to compare Annie’s relationship with her grandmother to students’ own ideas and experiences.

### **Building Background—Native American cultures reports**

We felt that the students needed background knowledge in two areas. First, they needed a working knowledge of certain philosophical views that are a part of many Native American cultures: reverence for nature; unity and harmony between humans, animals, and earth; and the cyclical process of life and death. These concepts are woven throughout the story. Second, students needed geographical knowledge: The story contains numerous references to geographical features of the setting (e.g., mesa, hogan, bluffs, pastures, and desert) and the daily activities of Annie and her family (e.g., herding, harvesting, weaving, and silver-smithing).

Each group of students was assigned a portion of the social studies text that dealt with the four major Native American ancestral cultures in North America. The textbook provides an overview of the regional differences that shaped the cultural, economic, and social life of the various peoples. Before students began to read the text, we explained the terms *ancestors* and *descendents* by using the teacher’s family tree to depict a lineage—current generation, parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. We were then able to clarify that the textbook dealt with the ancestors of Native Americans and that we were going to study early Native American ancestors in order to learn about the roots of Native American culture.

As part of the group assignment, each student read the text alone and completed a graphic organizer that categorized information (e.g., environment, shelter, clothing, food, religion, and art). Each group then synthesized all the information and created a single version of the graphic organizer that served as a guide for their presentation of information to the whole class. During the presentations, questions were asked by the teacher and other students, and uncertainties were clarified. Groups then returned to the social studies textbook to gather additional information, clarify ambiguities, and identify essential ideas in the reading material.

During a second round of presentations, the teacher highlighted and talked about the relationship between the characteristics of each tribe and their geographical surroundings, how each tribe adapted its means of subsistence in order to flourish in a particular area, and the central role nature played in the development of all the tribes. This provided the historical background necessary to introduce the philosophical views of Native Americans, specifically their reverence for nature and their belief in a natural cycle of life and death.

Our goal with the report presentations was to build a foundation of understanding about Native Americans. Specific terms and concepts could be further and better clarified as we began reading the story (e.g., the terms *going to Mother Earth*, *mesa*, and *harvesting*). But defining and clarifying specific terms while we are studying the story is more efficient and effective when students have a broader knowledge base for those terms.



## Working the Text

"Working the text" means studying it carefully—reading it, re-reading it, discussing it, writing about it, and listening to what others have written about it. In preparation for the unit, the teacher "chunks" the book into sections. The chunks set a pace at which students and teacher study the story. At least one lesson (a small group session) is devoted to each chunk. The goal of "chunking" is to create manageable portions of reading and meaningful junctures to engage the students in discussion and writing. Some chunks are short, because the content is complex and critical to the larger understanding of the story and theme(s). Other chunks are longer, because the content is more straightforward; in those cases, there is less of a need to intervene to work the text.

**Table 1. Chunking for *Annie and the Old One* Literature Unit**

<i>Chunk</i>	<i>Pages</i>	<i>Synopses of Chunks</i>	<i>Understandings to Develop</i>	<i>Discussion Topics</i>	<i>Literature Logs</i>
1	1–7	Describes Annie's environment, activities, and relationship with the Old One (grandmother), who tells Annie it's time for her to learn to weave.	The closeness between Annie and the Old One; fragility of the Old One—suggesting she may not have too long to live.	What have you learned about Annie and the Old One? (Who's Annie? What's expected of her? What kind of relationship does she have with the Old One?)	Write about someone you are very close to and describe your relationship. Or write about a time you thought someone you loved might die.
2	8–13	Annie seems lost in thought as she watches her mother weaving a new rug; Annie tells her mother she is not ready to start weaving.	The role of weaving—passed on from one generation to the next; and Annie's uncertainty about learning to weave.	Why do the Old One and Annie's mother think it is time for Annie to learn to weave? Why does Annie feel she is not ready to weave?	Describe an important responsibility you have at home that makes you feel grown up. Why does it make you feel more grown up?
3	13–17	The Old One tells her family she will die when the new rug is finished, then asks each member to choose a gift; Annie chooses the Old One's weaving stick.	The Old One's anticipation of death; the role of the gifts—a memory, legacy; significance of Annie's choice since she has not yet chosen to weave.	How does the Old One know she will die? Why does she let them each choose a gift? Why does Annie choose the weaving stick?	The Old One gave her family gifts. Write about a gift you received that is a memory of someone you loved who died or moved away.
4	18–37	Thinking she can forestall the Old One's death, Annie tries to disrupt her mother's work on the rug; later she begins removing portions of the rug.	Annie does not understand that the rug is only symbolic—a way to mark time—but her actions show how deeply she cares for the Old One.	How did Annie react to the Old One's news? Why? How would you react if someone you loved told you they were going to die? Why?	Annie can't accept that the Old One is going to die. If you could speak with Annie, what would you say to her or what advice would you give her?
5	38–44	The Old One discovers Annie's efforts and explains to Annie that death is a natural part of life, after which Annie declares herself ready to weave.	The Old One's descriptions of the natural cycle of life; Annie's thoughts and actions as she listens to the Old One and looks out on the desert before her.	What does the Old One mean, "Earth, to which all creatures finally go..."? What does Annie see, do, and think as she listens to her grandmother? What does she come to understand?	Why do you think Annie is now ready to weave?



Table 1 provides details on the five chunks of *Annie and the Old One*, including page numbers, synopses, understandings to develop, discussion topics, and literature log prompts. By “understandings to develop” we refer to content and ideas in the chunk that are central to a complete understanding of the story. Discussion topics and literature logs focus directly on those critical understandings. Discussion is designed to solidify students’ grasp of the literal details and the potential meaning and implications of the chunk in relationship to the theme and story as a whole. The literature log is intended to help students connect the events and ideas expressed in the story to their own lives: first, so they might increase their understanding of the characters’ motives and actions; and second, so they might see the relevance of the story and themes to their own experience.

Rather than discuss each chunk in detail, we will focus on chunks 3 and 5. These two chunks provide ample opportunity to illustrate the role of the four strategies during the portion of the unit when we are actually working the text with the students.

### **Chunk 3—Applying Background Knowledge and Connecting Personal Experiences**

The study of chunks 1 and 2 focused primarily on Annie’s relationship with her grandmother and Annie’s uncertain reaction to her grandmother’s invitation to learn to weave. We discussed with students the role of weaving in this story as a tradition handed down from one generation to the next. We also discussed how learning to weave represented a milestone in Annie’s growth and maturation—like taking on new, more adult-oriented chores and responsibilities (the topic of literature log 2). Both of these issues are important to understanding the significant events in chunk 3, when suddenly the Old One tells her family that she will soon die, and Annie surprisingly chooses the Old One’s weaving stick as her gift.

There were three critical things we wanted the students to understand in chunk 3: (a) the Old One’s ability to anticipate her own death; (b) the practice of family members choosing one of the Old One’s possessions as a gift, which relates directly to the legacy theme; and (c) Annie’s choice of her grandmother’s weaving stick, which is noteworthy because in the previous chunk Annie told her mother she was not yet ready to weave.

The background building we had done at the beginning of the unit facilitated discussion about the Old One’s announcement and her ability to anticipate death. Most students grasped what the Old One meant when she said, “When the new rug is taken from the loom, I will go to Mother Earth.” Students were familiar with the Native American belief that the Earth is the source of all life. For those students who did not make the connection, we defined the term for them (“going to Mother Earth” means she is about die; she will be returning to the source of all life—Earth).

The other point that needed clarification was the marker of time the Old One used—when the new rug is taken from the loom. We asked the students to consider whether the Old One meant that exactly as she said it (i.e., she would pass away when the rug was complete) or in some other way (i.e., as a more general way to mark time). Some students grasped the idea—and explained in the discussion—that the Old One and her family probably all knew about how long it takes to weave a rug and that her words were a way of saying, “in a few weeks or so.” We wanted to emphasize this issue, because in the next chunk it becomes clear that Annie makes a literal connection between the status of the rug and her grandmother’s imminent death.

Background knowledge also facilitated discussion of the Old One’s ability to anticipate her own death. When we posed the discussion question, “How does the Old One know she is about to die?” we asked students to locate an excerpt from the text that



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specifically helped to answer that question. Students noted the explanation Annie's mother gave to Annie: "Your grandmother is one of those who live in harmony with all nature—with earth, coyote, birds in the sky. They know more than many will ever learn. Those Old Ones know."

The excerpt provides an explanation, but interpreting its meaning requires the kind of background knowledge we studied as part of Native American cultures reports. The key words in the text are "living in harmony with all nature." We had specifically introduced the words "harmony" and "unity" as part of the background building lessons. In the discussion, students grasped the idea of living in close relationship to nature. Being sensitive, knowledgeable, and respectful of the earth and its creatures and their natural life cycle helps people better understand the ways in which they too are part of that natural cycle. The Old One probably did not know exactly when she would die, but her knowledge of nature provided her with a feeling for such things.

The discussion then turned to the practice of choosing gifts and to the question, "Why does the Old One let each family member choose a gift?" We wanted students to understand the idea of a legacy: When people leave us, we often have something tangible or intangible that helps us feel that we are not completely separated from them; the legacy links us to that person forever, despite the separation of distance or even death. We asked students to share experiences they had that were similar to Annie's. Students described gifts they had received that helped them remember a special person who had died or moved away.

This oral sharing activity served as a form of prewriting for the literature log entry that we use with chunk 3: "The Old One gave her family gifts. Write about a gift that is a memory from someone you loved who died or moved away." The oral sharing sets up the log entry. During the oral sharing, students have the opportunity to voice a experience that may be relevant to the particular log; they also have the opportunity to hear the experiences of others. When the sharing is complete, and the log prompt is announced, most students have already identified relevant personal experiences to write about. If some students recount experiences that stray from the prompt, the teacher can use examples introduced by other students to clarify the focus of the prompt. For students who do not have an experience called for by the prompt, an alternative is assigned. The assignment of the literature log concluded the lesson. Students completed the log for homework or at the independent center.

The next lesson began with the sharing of the literature logs, which provided an opportunity to examine the relationship between students' experiences and those of Annie and her family. The teacher charted how the gifts they had received helped them remember an important person and the particular things the gifts called into mind. We did the same for the gifts Annie and her family selected. Our point was that different gifts remind you of different things about that special person.

Table 2 shows two unedited samples of students' writing. (For consistency, all samples given in this section were authored by the same two students, whose work is generally representative of how most students responded to the various writing assignments discussed in this section. The names are pseudonyms.)



**Table 2. Literature Log 3—Sergio and Raul**

<i>Sergio</i> In the last two years I went to Mexico and my grandma died and she was 86 years old. She gave me a fotograf. Every time when I remember her I get the picture and I see it. That makes me feel like she is right there but she ain't. She used to play with me. I mis her so much.	<i>Raul</i> One day my grandpa was going to die. I felt so sad. Before he dies he told my brothers and me to line up because he was going to give us a surprise. I got a cap and money and my brothers got money I miss him.
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The students' logs provided a springboard for discussing why Annie would choose the weaving stick as her gift when she had not expressed any interest in learning how to weave. Some students thought Annie chose the stick because she associated it with her grandmother who used the stick every day. Other students thought she chose the stick specifically because her grandmother had recently announced that it was time for Annie to learn to weave. These students argued that Annie would soon begin to weave, but simply needed some time to get herself ready for that big step. Still other students thought that the Old One's announcement of her pending death changed Annie. It made her realize that she needed to learn to weave in order to carry on her grandmother's tradition. Our objective here was not to resolve this issue one way or the other; in fact, the text offers little with which to make a clear determination. We told the students that each of these interpretations is plausible, then explained that this was the kind of situation where you have to read more of the story to confirm possible interpretations.

### **Chunk 5—Assisting Students in Re-reading a Pivotal Passage**

In chunk 5, the Old One discovers Annie's efforts to forestall the completion of the rug. The next morning, she takes Annie to the top of a small mesa overlooking the desert, where she explains how life and death are part of a natural cycle. As her grandmother speaks, Annie observes various forms of life around her. Connecting her observations with her grandmother's words, Annie comes to a heightened understanding. In the subsequent and final scene of the story, Annie begins to weave.

The climactic scene on the top of the mesa is a complex but pivotal passage that required careful re-reading, for two reasons. First, the text itself contains multiple forms of narrative prose: description of the physical setting, the Old One's words, Annie's actions, and description of Annie's thoughts. Second, much of the language in the passage is figurative and requires students to make inferences about the meaning of such language as, "Earth, to which all creatures finally go." Yet the scene is critical to understanding the change Annie undergoes.

The focus of the lesson on chunk 5 was twofold: (1) What actually happens? and (2) What does it mean in relation to the whole story? Because the mesa scene is so complex, we had to devote a significant portion of time to assist the students in re-reading the passage. In order to do this, we broke the passage down into three parts: the initial description of Annie and the Old One sitting on the mesa, the Old One's explanation, and Annie's immediate reaction and reflection.

We started by recounting what had transpired thus far in the story. Students reviewed their books and described key events, which the teacher listed in sequence on chart paper. When we arrived at the pivotal scene in chunk 5 where Annie follows the Old One to the top of the mesa, we stopped and staged the scene, with students role playing Annie and her grandmother, walking together, sitting down on the edge of a desk, and looking out across an imagined desert.



We reviewed the story and staged the critical scene as a way of reconstructing the context in which the scene takes place—what happened previously and the immediate circumstances of the scene. Then we told students that we had arrived at a very dramatic and important part of the story. Students voiced their agreement, saying this is where Annie changes her mind and decides she is ready to weave. With that, we were able to pose the question that would guide a close re-reading of the passage: What happens here that leads Annie to change her mind?

We then turned our attention to the paragraph containing the Old One's explanation, identifying the sentences in quotation marks that indicate the Old One's words and those not in quotations that are part of the narrator's description.

**"My granddaughter," she said, "you have tried to hold back time. This cannot be done." *The desert stretched yellow and brown away to the edge of the morning sky. "The sun comes up from the edge of earth in the morning. It returns to the edge of the earth in the evening. Earth, from which good things come for the living creatures on it. Earth, to which all creatures finally go."* [Emphasis added]**

Referring back to our staging of the scene and asking students to imagine themselves as the characters, we asked the students why the author might have put that descriptive sentence ("The desert stretched . . .") right in the middle of the grandmother's words. Many students understood that the author was describing the scene, but they did not see the connection between that description and the grandmother's words. We needed to explain that the Old One was using what she saw before her (the morning sky) to explain her ideas ("The sun comes up from the edge of the earth in the morning"). It was important to draw students' attention to this, because in the subsequent paragraph, Annie begins to do the same thing—use what she sees around her to explain to herself the cycle of life and death.

Then we considered the Old One's two concluding lines: "Earth, from which all good things come for the living creatures on it. Earth, to which all creatures finally go." Initially, students locked onto the second sentence—all creatures go back to earth. Some interpreted that literally to mean, when one dies, one is buried in the earth. We had to explain how those two sentences work together: Earth provides good things for those creatures that live on it; when creatures die, they return to the earth; in returning to the earth, they help provide good things for those still living. In this way, there is an ongoing cycle that keeps moving as time carries on.

With that, we returned to the Old One's first remark: "You have tried to hold back time. This cannot be done." The question was, what does the Old One mean by "hold back time?" Having examined the entire paragraph, students understood that she meant the ongoing cycle—Annie could not hold back her grandmother's death. It was as inevitable as the sun rising and setting each day.

The next section of the passage is similarly complex, but it revisits the same ideas, only this time as Annie internalizes them.

**Annie picked up a handful of brown sand and pressed it against the palm of her hand. Slowly, she let it fall to earth. She understood many things.  
*The sun rose but it also set.  
The cactus did not bloom forever. Petals dried and fell to earth.  
She knew that she was part of the earth and the things on it. She would always be a part of the earth, just as her grandmother had always been, just as her grandmother would always be, always and forever.  
And Annie was breathless with the wonder of it. [Emphasis added]***



The author describes Annie's actions and her thoughts, rather than have her articulate her thoughts, as her grandmother had done in the previous paragraph. We had to bring this switch to the students' attention, because they didn't understand that the statements were not a description of the desert, but rather what Annie was thinking. As we did earlier in the lesson, we returned to the staging of the scene, with two students portraying Annie and her grandmother. While the students carried out Annie's actions—picking up the sand, pressing it against her palm, and letting it fall to earth, we highlighted the lines that described Annie's thinking: "The sun rose but it also set. . . ."

In order to help students identify with the way Annie was connecting this knowing to what she saw around her, we asked students about similar examples we could point to in our own lives. Students mentioned, for example, pets that are born, grow up, have babies, and then pass away; fruit that ripens and decays, but leaves a pit or seeds behind. On the basis of these examples, we then examined the last part of the passage. We asked the students to re-read the entire passage once again and then consider what this last paragraph meant: What did Annie understand?

**She knew that she was part of the earth and the things on it. She would always be a part of the earth, just as her grandmother had always been, just as her grandmother would always be, always and forever.  
And Annie was breathless with the wonder of it.**

Students said Annie knew that, just like the petals of the cactus flower dried and became part of the earth, so too would human beings—her grandmother, herself, and her family. And if people are still part of the earth when they die, then they can still be with you in your mind and your heart. That became a way for the students to express it—that the Old One would always be there for Annie as part of the earth and in her heart and mind.

In the final portion of chunk 5—the last scene in the story—Annie begins to weave. Discussion of the last scene took place in the next lesson. As a way to prepare for that discussion, we assigned the following literature log: Why does Annie begin to weave? The key understanding that came across in virtually every student's entry was that Annie had come to understand that she could not hold back time. Her efforts to disrupt completion of the rug could and would not forestall her grandmother's death. The students also talked about Annie's new understanding of death.

Table 3 presents log samples showing students' enriched understanding.

**Table 3: Literature Log 5—Sergio and Raul**

***Sergio***

I think Annie is now ready to weave because she is interested and because she could hand the weaving stick. I think she is big inof to weave and for her grandmother won't be sad. Because when Annie finish the rug her grandmother could be part of the earth and because she understood that her grandmother was still going to die because all people are part of earth. Even thou she is a person she still going to be part of earth.

***Raul***

Annie began to weave because she did understand about death because she understood that no one can stop anyone from dying. I think she did not worrie anymore because she knew that her grandmother will be in her heart and she would remember the good days when they were together. Annie also knew that her grandmother will be part of mother earth and she will be around in some ways.



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A handful of students, however, went further in their analysis to introduce the idea of Annie carrying on her grandmother's legacy: In her decision to begin weaving, Annie was continuing the traditions passed on to her by her grandmother. Here are two examples.

**I think Annie began to weave because now she knows that her grandmother will always be with her and that just as the sun can't be stoped from coming up and down she can't stop her grandmother from dying. *She also knows that her grandmother left her the knowledge of learning to weave.* [Marcos, literature log 5; emphasis added]**

**Annie now is ready to weave because her grandmother is going to die and Annie could cap [keep] the tradition of weaving so she could remember about her grandmother. She could remember when she started to weave and always remember her grandmother is going to be with her. [Luis, literature log 5; emphasis added]**

The array of responses in the logs provided a promising set of circumstances for the next lesson, where we wanted to work on the legacy theme as it pertained to the final scene in the story. On one level, Annie begins to weave because she has come to terms with her grandmother's death. On another, more sophisticated level, she is carrying on her grandmother's legacy. "She slipped the weaving stick in place, as her mother had done, as her grandmother had done." Judging from the log entries, almost all the students understood chunk 5 at the first level. But a few understood it at the second, and their log entries provided a starting point for discussing the legacy theme.

After logs were shared, the teacher summarized the prevailing idea that Annie now had a better understanding that death is inevitable but means only a physical separation. Moving on to student logs that mentioned Annie carrying on her grandmother's traditions, we asked the students to consider what things Annie would have to preserve her grandmother's memory. Students listed a number of things: the weaving stick, her knowledge about how to weave, the many stories her grandmother had told her, memories of special times they had together, and the wisdom her grandmother had passed on about life. Through each of these, her grandmother would live on for Annie.

## Culminating the Unit

### Culminating Writing—Extending the Written Discourse

Culminating writing projects have two goals: (1) to develop a deeper understanding of some aspect of the literature unit (content, themes, and related personal experiences), and (2) to develop a high-quality piece of writing. As part of the writing project, students share their drafts, receive feedback from peers and teacher, and revise and edit their work. The process is designed to address most directly goal 2—Students develop a high-quality piece of writing. But it also addresses goal 1—Through the process of writing and revising, students spend more time thinking about and articulating some aspect of the unit.

In our experiences with the *Annie* unit, the most compelling topic has been literature log 3, in which students write about a gift they received that helps them remember someone who died or moved away. Almost all students have had such an experience, but there is a consistent pattern in their initial drafts. They focus primarily on the gift itself and do not develop the circumstances in which it was received, their relationship with the person, or how the gift endures and continues to remind them of that person.



When students shared their entries during the *Annie* unit, invariably their peers began to ask them questions about these important details.<sup>1</sup>

As students respond to these questions, it often seems as if it is the first time they begin to unpackage and articulate the emotional impact and the meaning of the gift, elaborating both the experience itself and the discourse with which they describe it. Perhaps that is why students are so willing to work on this log entry for the culminating project. It is a form of discovering and making explicit the legacy of an important relationship, just as Annie did.

As we do with each log, students write the questions posed by their peers and the teacher. These questions then become the first source of consideration when students begin a second draft. As part of the rotation process, the students worked independently on a second draft. When each group came to its time with the teacher, each student read his or her draft, while the other students and the teacher listened for how well their questions had been answered. The next revision was accomplished through individual conferences with peers. A final revision came as a result of conferencing with the teacher. Final drafts were shared with the whole class and at home, then displayed in the room.

Table 4 presents the two finished pieces produced by the same students whose first attempts at writing about their personal experiences with the subject was presented in Table 2.

**Table 4. Culminating Writings by Sergio and Raul**

***My Grandmother's Gift***  
**by Sergio G.**

For the last two years I have been going to Mexico in the summer to visit my grandmother. After my last visit she gave me a photograph of herself. Two weeks after we returned from our visit last summer we got a call from my aunt. She told us that my grandma died because she was 86 years old and sick.

Every time when I remember her I get the picture out and I look at it. That makes me feel like she is right there beside me even though she isn't. She used to play with me everyday when I was in Mexico. I miss her so much. What made my grandma special was that she used to play with me and care about me. She used to tell me stories about a little monster. The stories would scare me but I knew she was just playing with me.

***A Special Gift***  
**by Raul C.**

When I lived in Mexico four years ago my grandpa was very sick and dying. One morning before he died he called my five brothers and me to come into his room because he wanted to give us a gift to remember him. We were very surprised. My brothers and I got money but I also got his cap. He wore the cap when he was a captain of the cavalry in the Mexican Army.

That day I felt very sad because I knew he was going to die. We started to cry when he told us he would always be in our hearts forever. Soon he died. I will never forget him because I love him so much.



## POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE TRANSITION PROGRAM: EVALUATION RESULTS

Do transition students benefit from the kind of literacy instruction described in the previous section? Our evaluation studies suggest they do (Saunders, in press). Data were collected for samples of project case studies and students from comparable, neighboring schools in the district. All students were enrolled at their respective school since first grade and participated in a Spanish bilingual program following the same district guidelines. Matching of the two samples was based on first-grade standardized measures of Spanish reading and language achievement.

The results presented here are for those project case studies who were part of Jerry McLean's fifth-grade classroom, the same class featured in the previous section. These particular students (n = 18 and 18 matched comparison students) provide the best gauge of the program's impact, because we began intensive research and development at Mr. McLean's school earlier than other project schools. As a result, from second through fifth grade, these students participated in our most advanced implementation of the program. As early as second grade, these students received Spanish language arts that included many of the instructional components that comprise our program (as well as our oral English development component).

These data indicate that the program is providing students with a demonstrably successful transition experience. First, with regard to literacy achievement, from the end of first grade to the end of fourth grade, as gauged by standardized Spanish language achievement tests, project case studies made significantly higher gains in Spanish reading and language than nonproject students. Table 5 shows that mean national percentile scores for project students increased from the 44th to 72nd percentile in reading and from the 40th to the 78th percentile in language. In comparison, percentile scores for nonproject students showed smaller gains: from the 44th to the 52nd in reading and from the 41st to the 62nd in language.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of Grade 5, whether tested in English or Spanish,<sup>3</sup> project case studies scored significantly higher than nonproject students (see Table 5). Project case studies tested in English (14 of 18) scored, on average, at the 36th national percentile in reading and at the 55th in language; nonproject students tested in English (also 14 of 18) scored at the 27th and 31st percentiles. To be reclassified from "limited" to "fluent" English proficient, students must score at or above the 36th national percentile in both English reading and language. Fifty percent of the project students (9/18) but only 11% of nonproject students (2/18) took English tests, met the criteria, and were reclassified.

**Table 5. Mean national percentile scores from Grades 1–5 for Project and Nonproject students on standardized measures of Spanish and English reading and language achievement**

Grade	Language of Test	— Reading —		— Language —	
		Project	Nonproject	Project	Nonproject
1st	Spanish	44	44	40	41
2nd	Spanish	55	47	49	41
3rd	Spanish	62	49	73	61
4th	Spanish	72	52	78	62
5th	English (n = 14 & 14)	36	27	55	31
	Spanish (n = 4 & 4)	48	23	40	16

NOTE: Data are based on the same 18 project and 18 nonproject case study students. The Spanish language test is *APRENDA* (Psychological Corp.); the English language test is *California Test of Basic Skills, Form U* (CTB/McGraw Hill).



**Table 6. Results from Grade 5 for Project and Nonproject students on project-developed performance-based measures of English language arts achievement**

<i>Assessment Task Name, Question, Description, Measure</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Project (n = 18)</i>	<i>Nonproject (n = 18)</i>
Self-Selected Story—Are students remembering and understanding stories they have read? Students select a story; summarize it; write a short essay about a theme for the piece. Scored for completeness of summary and explanation of theme.	mean score % 4 or better % 3 or better	3.06 28% 78%	2.33 0% 33%
Assigned Story—Can students read and understand a grade appropriate story? Students read about 2/3 of a grade-appropriate, unfamiliar story; summarize what they read; and write an ending. Scored for comprehension.	mean score % 4 or better % 3 or better	3.00 22% 78%	2.33 6% 28%
Assigned Article—Can students read and understand a grade appropriate informational text? Students read a grade-appropriate informational text, synthesize most important points, write a short essay based on an inference question. Scored for comprehension.	mean score % 4 or better % 3 or better	3.39 44% 89%	2.44 0% 44%
Conventions—Can students use written conventions effectively in their own writing? Summary portion of self-selected story task is scored for correct usage, mechanics, and spelling.	mean score % 4 or better % 3 or better	3.17 39% 78%	2.67 17% 50%
Dictation—Can students accurately write what is dictated to them? Students take dictation for a grade-appropriate selection; scored for correct usage, mechanics, and spelling.	mean score % 4 or better % 3 or better	3.28 39% 83%	2.83 33% 67%
OVERALL: Average across all five measures	mean score % 4 or better % 3 or better	3.18 11% 67%	2.52 0% 17%

NOTE: All tasks are scored on a 6-point scale: A score of 4 means students are meeting challenging grade-level standards; 3 means students are demonstrating at least basic competence and approaching those standards.

Table 6 shows that project students also scored significantly higher than nonproject students on project-developed performance-based measures of English reading and writing. In fact, 67% of project students, in comparison to 17% of nonproject students, demonstrated at least basic competence on all five measures.

There are also important qualitative differences between project and nonproject students apparent in the data we gathered at the end of Grade 5. For example, 61% of project students but only 22% of nonproject students were able to list 10 or more books they had read on their own over the previous year (average number of items for each sample: 11.27 and 5.88). Moreover, 67% of project students in comparison to 33% of nonproject students said they used the public library over the previous year and listed specific books they had checked out. As another indication of these differences in reading experiences, one third of the nonproject students (33%) could not think of a story they knew well enough to write about (see Self-Selected Story task in Table 6) other than a familiar fairy tale (e.g., Goldilocks and the Three Bears); the figure was exactly half that for project students (17%).

Project students also responded quite differently from nonproject students when asked to describe the characteristics of a good reader and a good writer. The vast majority of nonproject students said good readers read or practice a lot; a substantial number said good readers know how to pronounce all the words. Only 11% of nonproject students mentioned any kind of mental actions involved in reading. In contrast, 67% of project students listed specific strategies that good readers use, such



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as summarizing, asking oneself questions, and stopping to think. The same pattern emerged when we asked students about writing. Most nonproject students (89%) said good writers practice a lot, spell words correctly, and write neatly. Only 11% mentioned any kind of concrete strategies. In comparison, 61% of project students mentioned specific writing process strategies, such as clustering ideas before you write, thinking about what you want to say, re-reading as you write, making more than one draft, and reading your paper to someone else.

Finally, while students in both groups reported positive attitudes toward English literacy, project students were significantly more likely to report positive attitudes toward Spanish literacy. For instance, 94% of nonproject students and all project students said they liked reading and writing in English. In contrast, only 44% of nonproject students in comparison to 89% of project students said they liked reading and writing in Spanish. Moreover, all students in both samples said they wanted to continue to learn to read and write well in English, but only 50% of nonproject students in comparison to 89% of project students said they wanted to continue to learn to read and write well in Spanish. In short, while the vast majority of project students reported healthy attitudes toward English and Spanish, fully half the nonproject students said they did not like and had little interest in continuing to learn how to read and write well in their home language.

## DISCUSSION

We close by returning to the four theoretical premises that undergird our program: challenge, comprehensiveness, continuity, and connections. These premises represent key understandings we have arrived at over the course of our work on conceptualizing, operationalizing, and implementing effective programs for transition students.

First, transition can and should concentrate heavily on challenging content: engaging stories, information, concepts, themes, ideas, and knowledge. As illustrated in the *Annie and the Old One* unit, with proper support and assistance, transition students *can* read, discuss, and write about challenging material. In fact, as indicated by our evaluation results, they appear to benefit from such opportunities. Transition students also need explicit language instruction and practice (our next point), but we view the intellectual substance of the literature units as the driving force in our program. From the perspective of project teachers, the literature units—supported by the specific strategies discussed in this chapter—foster a motivating, academic context that is often lacking during the transition period.

**It thrills me when I see my students now making connections. What was before just a book now has a purpose, a meaning in their own life. I think that is what our literature studies have given our students which then makes everything more pleasurable. And they can bring enthusiasm into the study, and when you bring enthusiasm well then you are going to learn more because you want to, because it means something. I think that's the greatest success of our program is bringing meaning and pleasure to what we study. [LM, project teacher, at a team meeting]**

Second, transition instruction should be comprehensive. In this report, we have featured our approach to studying literature. But there are other instructional components that play significant supporting roles in our program, including those which focus directly on language and literacy skills—such as dictation, lessons in the conventions of written language, comprehension strategies, assigned independent reading—and those which foster broader literacy-related experiences and attitudes, such as pleasure reading, teacher read-alouds, and interactive journals. This array of components might



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appear eclectic, perhaps even contradictory. But in designing the program and adapting each of these components, we consistently tried to address the needs of the students as we identified them.

For example, although studying literature drives the program, it does not—as we found—provide students with sufficient reading practice and experience. A year of instruction involves only three to five literature units. Our pleasure-reading program did not fully meet this need. Students’ self-selected reading is based more on interest—as it should be—than on increasingly sophisticated texts that support skill development. Consequently, we developed assigned independent reading centers, at which students were required to read specific material (including basal selections) and complete fairly conventional assignments (e.g., comprehension questions). These centers addressed an important need and improved our total program.

Like transition teachers described elsewhere (Gersten, 1996), teachers and advisors in our project saw the need to be comprehensive, to synthesize across rather than pit in opposition various approaches to teaching and learning (directed lessons and instructional conversation, literature and basals, writing projects and dictation). The benefits of this comprehensiveness are reflected in the results of our evaluation studies, which reveal important differences between project and nonproject students on a range of standardized and performance-based measures of basic skills and higher level achievement, as well as literacy-related attitudes and understandings.

Third, there should be continuity across the transition and pretransition years. Helping students make successful transitions depends heavily on an effective primary and middle grade Spanish literacy program (as well as oral English development). Our strongest evaluation results—like those presented in this chapter—come from project schools where students experience exposure to the program’s instructional components in Grade 2, then (nearly) full implementation across Pre-Transition, Transition I, and Transition II in Grades 3 through 5. Project teachers and advisors see this continuity in curriculum and instruction as extremely important. To begin with, the instructional components yield higher levels of Spanish literacy at Grades 2 and 3, so students transition with a stronger first language foundation. But continuity yields a related and equally important benefit, which leads us to our final point.

Fourth, during transition every effort must be made to make explicit *connections* between learning English and students’ prior learning and experiences in Spanish. In our program, English literacy is initiated in Transition I through the same instructional components students experienced in Spanish during Pre-Transition in second and third grade. This, of course, saves time, because students are familiar with the kinds of activities and assignments they will do, but more importantly, it allows teachers to make a direct connection between what students learned to do in Spanish and what they are being asked to do in English. The same students who participated in the *Annie and the Old One* unit at the beginning of Grade 5 had already participated in similarly designed units based on Spanish literature in Grades 2 and 3. Explicitly connecting Spanish and English learning and creating greater continuity between Spanish and English instruction have helped reduced the stark and often destructive disjunctures students face when they transition.



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## NOTES

1. Students ask the authors questions as a part of the log sharing process. Our approach to sharing and response draws upon the work of Graves (1983) and Calkins (1991).
2. Comparisons reported here have been subjected to appropriate statistical significance testing. The term "significant" is used in those cases where differences are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). All analyses of standardized test data were conducted on Normal Curve Equivalent scores; mean NCEs have been converted to national percentile ranks for summary purposes only. See Saunders (in press) for a more technical analysis.
3. Based on district guidelines, LEP students are eligible to take standardized tests in English 3 semesters after they formally qualify to begin transition, prior to which students continue to take Spanish language tests.

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Note: "BB" refers to Background Building; "CW" refers to Culminating Writing Project.



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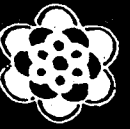
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